

~~Cat 620~~

Speech or Non:  
Conf Pam #646

D99062063Z



Conf  
Pam  
#646

# SPEECH

OF

HON. THOS. S. GHOLSON,

OF VIRGINIA,

ON THE

POLICY OF EMPLOYING NEGRO TROOPS, AND THE  
DUTY OF ALL CLASSES TO AID IN THE  
PROSECUTION OF THE WAR.

Delivered in the House of Representatives of the Congress of the Confederate States,  
on the 1st of February, 1865.

---

RICHMOND:  
GEO. P. EVANS & CO., PRINTERS.  
1865.

12.

13.

14.

15.

16.

17.

18.

19.

20.

21.

22.

23.

24.

25.

26.

27.

28.

29.

30.

31.

32.

33.

34.

35.

36.

37.

38.

39.

40.

41.

42.

43.

44.

45.

46.

47.

48.

49.

50.

51.

52.

53.

54.

55.

56.

57.

58.

59.

60.

61.

62.

63.

64.

65.

66.

67.

68.

69.

70.

71.

72.

73.

74.

75.

76.

77.

78.

79.

80.

81.

82.

83.

84.

85.

86.

87.

88.

89.

90.

91.

92.

93.

94.

95.

96.

97.

98.

99.

100.

T. R. -  
973.79  
- 299 M.  
U. S. A.  
No. 5

Con.  
Bm  
# 246

# SPEECH OF HON. THOS. S. GHOLSON,

## OF VIRGINIA.

Upon the introduction of resolutions to the effect that while we should be ready to treat for peace, we should prepare to prosecute the war with vigor, by placing every man liable to service in the field, and ceasing to agitate the policy of employing negro troops as soldiers, Mr. GHOLSON rose and said:

MR. SPEAKER:

No question of more serious import has been agitated, since the commencement of the present war, than the proposition, to arm and employ our slaves as soldiers in the field. That they may be judiciously used in building fortifications, and as teamsters, cooks, &c., will not be controverted—indeed, it is to be regretted, that they have not already been more extensively so employed. They are accustomed to such service, and could be kept under the proper discipline and control. Every slave, who takes the place of a soldier engaged in driving wagons, cooking, &c., adds another musket to our number. It is obviously not only proper, but our duty to permit no “able bodied man” to remain in any position, the duties of which may be as well performed by a slave. Let our authorities therefore see to it, that all such positions are at once filled by slaves, and that the legion of strong, athletic men, who are even now, to be found all over the country, filling unimportant offices, the duties of which could be just as well discharged by the “halt or lame,” or by men above the military age, are immediately sent to the field, and our armies would be able to drive the enemy from our borders.

But, it is proposed to go further—to put arms in the hands of our slaves, and fight them as soldiers. It is declared, that leading individuals in various sections of the Confederacy, favour the proposition, while several of our prominent newspapers openly advocate the policy. We are to raise a vast army of slaves—from two hundred to two hundred and fifty thousand—arm and equip them, and march them forth to meet our enemies. The advocates of the proposition, seem filled with enthusiasm on the subject, and promise themselves and the country the most happy results.

It is assumed, that slaves will make good and reliable soldiers—that some slaves would, need not be denied, but that our slaves generally will make reliable soldiers, the advocates of the measure, are not warranted in assuming. I regard the whole scheme with deep concern, and have the strongest convictions, that no matter in what aspect it may be considered, it is unwise, and should be promptly rejected.



First. It is an *experiment* on a grand scale, and would virtually stake our success in this great struggle, on the capacity and fidelity of negro soldiers. For, if instead of keeping our white men in the field, and sending all able bodied men there, who are now at home, we should make so large a portion of our forces to consist of slaves, we necessarily throw on them—the slaves—to a considerable extent, the question of victory or defeat. If they should prove true, capable, firm and courageous in the day of battle, they would render great service—if they proved deficient in these qualities, they might prove our ruin. The bravest and best disciplined troops have had victory snatched from them, by the ignorance, infidelity, or cowardice of the incapable, faithless or timid. *The experiment is hazardous.*

Nature seems to have fitted our slaves, as a race, above others, for servants. They are loyal, obedient, submissive and grateful, but timid and unstable as children. Kept at home, and subjected to proper discipline, they are useful and happy. Freed from restraint, and exposed to evil influences, they become licentious and fanatical. They are credulous, and may be easily deceived. Let the facts of this war be consulted for confirmation of this. Our enemies hoped, and all Europe expected, that the commencement of hostilities would be followed by the insurrection of our slaves, and deeds too black and horrible to be named. Our slaves were to rise up and conquer us, if our enemies could not. War, with its varying fortunes, has now existed for nearly four years, and yet, although we have among us, more than three millions of slaves, there has been no insurrection or attempt at insurrection, while life and property have been more secure—ininitely more secure with us, than with our enemies. Our wives and children have been left on our plantations—frequently with no other protection, than that afforded by our slaves. These slaves have taken care of our property, cultivated our fields, and gathered our crops. Their loyalty was never more conspicuous, their obedience never more childlike. These are facts—indisputable facts. Let the world ponder them.

Yet, as already stated, they are credulous, and easily misled. Our enemies have made to such of them as they could reach fair promises, and given them glowing accounts of the freedom they were fighting to confer upon them—of the land of “milk and honey” into which they would carry them. Credulous creatures! They have placed confidence in Yankee promises. Hence, many of them either deserted their homes, or else were made willing captives—and now have liberty; yes, in the words of Lord Campbell, “liberty to starve.” Many of them have already escaped from their liberty-bondage, and returned to their masters. They agree in declaring, that those, who have escaped to, or been captured by their Yankee friends, with very few exceptions, long to return to their masters and their homes. That they were deceived, and made to run away from us, does not show, when properly considered, that they are not loyal, and submissive as a race. It does show, that they are credulous, and may be induced to do at one moment, what they will regret in the next. It may, if you please, prove more—that though unfit for freedom, they can be deceived by false friends, with the idea of liberty. But the fact still remains notorious and indisputable, that with more than three millions of slaves among us, in the midst of a war, waged, as they are told, for their emancipation, they

remain faithful and obedient—commit no acts of violence or blood—that, life and property have been more secure among us during the whole time, than among our enemies, who boast, *that they have no slaves*.

It is, however, because the slave is credulous and timid, that the experiment proposed, is full of hazard. I have said, that nature seemed to have fitted our slaves to be servants; it certainly has not qualified them for war. I speak of them as a race—not of exceptional cases. They are fond of music, and sport with infinite satisfaction soldier clothes, but from muskets and cannon, they pray to be delivered.

It is not necessary to hold, that you cannot raise and educate slaves to become soldiers. In making the experiment proposed, we should have to take them as they are—grown up, totally ignorant of the use of fire-arms, and timid. You would have to remove this ignorance and overcome this timidity. The first, you could accomplish more readily than the last, but it may well be asked, how long it would require to make a raw negro a capable soldier? How long, before a mass of negro troops would, in the day of battle, be free from panic? I repeat, the experiment is hazardous. The coolest, bravest troops are not always able to withstand the influences of panic, though they may have done nothing to produce it. Let it be remembered, that the Yankees cannot trace a single victory during this war to their negro troops, while on the contrary, defeat has attended them, I believe, on all occasions, in which they have employed them as soldiers. How often, have wavering, unreliable troops, turned victory into defeat?

But, suppose you make them brave—firm in their courage—you have not yet removed their credulity—their liability to be deceived and deluded by our enemies. If each man could have, in the day of battle, his slave by his side, he could protect him from their fraud and deception, but this would be impossible. The spies and secret emissaries of the enemy, would be continually among them, producing mischief before we apprehended it—encouraging them to infidelity and desertion—and when they fell into their hands as prisoners of war, who can believe, that they would be able to resist Yankee fraud and cunning? They are averse to fighting. Our enemies know this, and would promise all deserters not only their freedom, but exemption from military duty. Would they stand up, face danger and fight for us, or would they lay down their arms, and go to those who, professing to be their friends, promise them protection from their masters, and freedom from all the dangers of the battle-field? It seems to me, that they know little of the negro character, who would expect them to remain firm under such circumstances. They would desert by hundreds and thousands. They would go to avoid danger, if for nothing else. But more would be promised—full rations, fine clothes, and no work. Gentlemen may delude themselves, but whenever the experiment is made, it will prove to be a “recruiting service” for our enemies. It will weaken our own army.

The circumstances under which we should introduce our slaves into our army, are so entirely different, from those under which, they have ever been made soldiers before, that I do not stop to review historical references.

I need not enlarge on these fruitful suggestions. They are surely



sufficient, however, to shew, that there is danger in the "experiment."

Second. The introduction of slaves into our army, would not only be hazardous for the reasons stated, but it would be offensive to many of the brave men, who constitute our veteran army. To make a slave a good soldier, you must not only put arms in his hands; you must make him feel, that he is a soldier. You can not fight white and black in the same army, without putting them on the same footing. You cannot say, how long you will fight this portion of your army on one part of the field, and that portion on another part. You must be governed by events, as they occur—and in most battles, before the "victory is lost and won," different portions of the army are mixed up and brought together. Our soldiers have been brought up to believe—we all believe—the negro an inferior race. Will they then consent to march and fight with this inferior race, on terms of equality? If you fight black and white on the same field, they must fight together. If they conquer, they will rejoice over their victory together—if they are defeated and captured, they must be prisoners together—eat and sleep together. White and black prisoners, captured by us at the "explosion" at Petersburg, were placed in the same hospital, and occupied cots adjoining each other. They must be subject to the same military law, tried by the same courts-martial, and subjected to the same punishment.

If, as already stated, each soldier could carry his own slave—keep him constantly by his own side, inspire him by his presence and protection, they could probably be fought to advantage, and the relation of master and slave kept up—but this can not be done, and instead of the master commanding his slave, by the plan proposed, the slave would necessarily be made his equal, and lose the wholesome influence of his authority.

The attempt may be made, to fight white and black soldiers together in the same army, and still keep up the present distinction between them, but it will fail. It cannot be done. If the army are opposed to the introduction of slaves as soldiers, there is an end of the question. I have no desire to make any plan or scheme offensive to them, which the public interests may require. I mention these obvious facts, to shew that you can not make this scheme otherwise than offensive to them. Let every man who has felt inclined to favour this experiment, ask himself, how the matter is to be arranged? How white and black can be fought in the same army, without placing them practically on terms of equality? Whether our soldiers will be satisfied to fight through this war, side by side with our slaves? Whether they desire these sable comrades? Let it not be said, it is a mere prejudice, and will soon be overcome. It is a prejudice, which has "grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength." They feel their superiority, and you can not eradicate the "prejudice." This sense of superiority makes them more manly in their conduct, braver in the field. You should not eradicate it, if you could. It is part and parcel of their character.

Third. To the slaves introduced into our army, and who prove faithful, the boon of freedom is to be given at the termination of the war. What is this but abolition? The proposition is, "go into our ar-

mies—fight our enemies—fight bravely, and when peace comes, we will make you free.” Then, liberty to the slave is a boon. Is not this precisely what the abolitionist holds? And is it not for this boon, that he calls upon the slave to come and fight with him, against his master? Does he not proclaim him free, not at the termination of the war, but now—as soon as he deserts his master? Is it not a surrender of the ground, on which we defend slavery? We hold, that freedom to the slave is a curse, that all experience has shown him incapable of self-government—that, if left to himself, he would return to a state of barbarism—that liberty to him as a race, is simply liberty to starve—that they are and ever have been “children”—that we have no more right to turn them loose—give them their own way, than we would have to permit our children to go without restraint—to do as they please. But, we are now to declare by our conduct, that we have been insincere and hypocritical in these solemnly proclaimed convictions, or else, that we propose to reward our soldier-slaves by a curse, and not by a blessing—that instead of giving them an egg, we desire to give them a serpent.

If we have been in error heretofore—if liberty to our slaves be really a boon—if they really be fit and qualified for liberty, and should receive it as a merited reward for military service, then we surrender the whole question, and should forthwith emancipate them. For whenever it is made to appear, that our slaves are prepared for freedom, and would be happier by reason of being free, it becomes our duty to detain them no longer—and though we may have inherited them, or purchased them with our money, we are oppressors, if we still hold them in bondage. Our theory and our conviction have been, that the restraint we impose, affords them the only liberty they have ever enjoyed—that is, freedom from the dominion and vices of the barbarian. When we surrender this ground, the abolitionist gains a triumph, and the argument is concluded. Surely, those who favour this experiment, have not reflected on these things.

Some, who advocate the introduction of slaves into the army, perceiving these results, do not propose emancipation as a reward for faithful services. They are surely more consistent, than their associates in the scheme, although the abolitionists would declare, that they were making the slave fight for his chains. But the number of these is small. The plan is, that we are to reward them at the termination of the war, with their freedom.

And suppose the war ended—our independence achieved—that the slaves carried into the war have proved faithful; that they have remained with us and fought for prospective freedom, rather than deserted to our enemies and received present freedom, what then is to become of these freed men? We surely will not deny them a home, in the land they have defended—so, we should have a large number of free negroes scattered over the several States. We shall have conceded, that they are worthy of freedom. No State could deny to their black soldiers, liberty to remain within their limits, no matter what may be the provisions of their present constitutions on that subject. What shall become of their wives and children? Shall they remain slaves, while their husbands and fathers, who have fought for our liberties and their homes, are permitted to become wandering vagabonds, and finally die of starvation—having by their valour, earned the glorious “liberty to starve?” Or



shall we give liberty to their wives and children, and thus make our black population part free and part slave? What then would be the condition of our country? Who would consent to live in it? What would become of slavery? What would be the character of the returned negro-soldiers, made familiar with the use of fire-arms, and taught by us, that freedom was worth fighting for? In many sections of the country, the two races could not continue together. According to the census of 1860, the white population of five of the counties, composing my Congressional District, was 13,792, the black population 31,228. I allude to the counties of Prince George, Nottoway, Amelia, Powhatan and Cumberland. There would be near 6000 male slaves, between the ages of 18 and 45. If 150 or 200,000 slaves were put into the army, it would require, as I will shew hereafter, at least half between those ages—so, that from the five counties named, there would be taken about 3000 male slaves. Suppose only 2000 of this number are returned, after having fought as well and bravely, as the friends of the scheme promise themselves, we should then have some 400 free negro soldiers, in each of these counties. We shall have taught them, as already stated, the use of fire-arms, and that liberty is worth fighting for. They will have learned, the power of combination, and have their minds set on mustering and guns. Naturally averse to labour, they will have become indolent and mischievous. They will be without restraint, and ready for all excesses. Here let the curtain drop. Objections multiply as we advance, and I can do but little more, than suggest them.

Fourth. By the conscription of slaves, we shall surrender every ground, assumed by us on the subject, at the commencement of the war. We denounced our enemies and invoked upon them the indignation of every generous mind. We declared, that we would never, under any circumstances, recognize their right to arm our slaves against us—that their conduct in this respect was wicked and diabolical—that no necessity should induce us to treat our own slaves as prisoners of war.

We are now to follow their example and meet them on the field with negro troops. True, they could not complain. It would be just towards them. But, if we make soldiers of our slaves, we shall be bound by every principle of justice and humanity, to claim for them the rights of soldiers—that in case of capture by the enemy, they are to be treated as prisoners of war. We shall thereby acknowledge a corresponding right on the part of the enemy. There will no longer be any controversy with "Beast Butler" about the exchange of negro troops. We shall have settled that question. Our enemies may entice our slaves away to-day, place them in battle against us to-morrow—we may capture them, and should have no right to detain and hand them over to their masters. We shall have placed negro troops on the same footing, with white troops. Thus, we shall have backed down from every position assumed by us, in the beginning of the war.

Fifth. It would be a confession of weakness on our part, which would inspire the enemy with renewed confidence, and induce greater exertions. For they would then really believe, what they have heretofore, so frequently declared without believing, that the rebellion was on "its last legs." A shout of rejoicing would go up from all Yankeedom;

and we should hear from every hill and valley, "we have conquered slavery." It would enable them to raise troops without number, for their men would be made to believe, that all they had to do, was to march forth and take possession of the "goodly land." It is a mistake to suppose, as many do, that our enemy are alarmed at the idea of our arming slaves. They would rejoice at it.

Sixth. And there is another objection to the experiment—one, which ordinary prudence will not permit us to overlook, or lightly to consider. I allude to the effect, which the abstraction of so large a number of able-bodied slaves would have on the production of supplies. There are but few localities in the country, in which any considerable surplus of provisions is raised, and our means of transportation are so limited, and so liable to interruption, that we can not safely rely upon distant points for the support of our armies and people. Necessity, therefore, requires every section to raise as large crops as its means will allow. And I surely need not remind this House, that heretofore we have had great difficulty in so distributing the products of the country, as to prevent want in the army and among the people. How vain it would be, to marshall a large army, and then be compelled to disband it for the want of food, while we heard the cries of women and children, begging for bread? If we had surplus labour—if we produced more bread and meat than were necessary, then we could afford to spare labour, but if our supplies have been limited, and if they are to be further diminished by the withdrawal from our fields of a large number of the best labourers, to be used on fortifications, as cooks, teamsters, &c., (a measure to which there is but little opposition,) it becomes us seriously to inquire, whether it is safe to make a still further draft upon the labour of the country, to try such an experiment as that proposed.

And in the consideration of this question, it will not do to prove by figures, that we shall have supplies in abundance. They must be available. What will it profit the army and people of Virginia to know that there is corn to spare in Northern Mississippi, unless it can be transported to Virginia? And if we could with our present means transport supplies for the army, we could not do so for the people, generally, and hence the absolute necessity for producing the necessary supplies in the different sections of the country.

The employment of slaves as teamsters and cooks, and upon our fortifications, commends itself to our approbation, because we see them performing service appropriate for slaves, and know that we are thereby able to send reliable soldiers into the field; but when we take them from the plough, and put arms into their hands, we know that we shall produce less bread and meat, while we have no assurance that we add available and trusty soldiers to our ranks.

The question of supplies involves the existence of our army. Food is as indispensable as men, and we should act unwisely to increase the number of the one, by endangering the sufficiency of the other. Let those who would treat this view lightly, remember the great scarcity of provisions during the last year, and how often we have been pained to hear that our army was on short rations.

The number of able-bodied slaves now in the Confederacy, and which could be controled for military service, is much exaggerated.



The whole number of male slaves in the Confederacy, according to the census of 1860, was 1,930,089. From this number must be deducted for Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, Tennessee and Texas, 657,434, and for the losses sustained in Mississippi, 60,000, Virginia, 90,000, North Carolina, 40,000, South Carolina, 20,000, Georgia, 50,000, Alabama, 20,000. This would leave the slave population, from which we could draw men, not more than 1,000,000. Of course this calculation is not accurate, and in the nature of the case, could not be accurate, but I think it near enough the mark for the purpose. The Trans-Mississippi States are not included, because while they would not be needed there, they could not be brought over to be used on this side. Of this number I think it may be assumed, that there are males between the ages of 18 and 45, 335,000. From which deduct 40,000, who are to be employed upon fortifications, and as teamsters, cooks, &c., and there would be left less than 300,000. Virginia has a white population of upwards of a million, by the census of 1860, and there was, according to the computation of the Auditor, 168,000 males between the ages of 18 and 45, and I have arrived at the number of black males between the same ages, by adopting the same ratio.

We have drawn heavily upon our white population to make up our armies, because we could rely upon our slaves to raise the necessary supplies. It is now proposed to go among the slaves, and make soldiers of them. Certainly no necessity, present or future, will justify such a policy, until it is shown beyond peradventure, that we shall have the means of feeding our army. Notwithstanding our enemies have robbed us of many of our slaves, it is unquestionably true, that thus far, they have proved an element of strength. Without slaves to cultivate our fields, we could not have carried so many of our white men into the army. As long as we keep them at the plough, they will remain an element of strength. When we convert the plough-share into the musket, whether *they* will help us to whip the enemy, *who* now enable us to feed our army, is a question too doubtful to justify a mere experiment.

There are some errors which may be corrected, while there are others which are irremediable. Let us beware, lest in our anxiety to increase our army, we fail to feed it.

And there is yet another difficulty, and that, too, of a grave and delicate nature. The Confederate Government has no authority over the institution of slavery in the States. Each State manages and controls it, in its own way. The Confederate Government has not a foot of land upon which to bury a slave, much less to settle him, after he is liberated. Surely it would not rush blindly into the employment of negro troops, engaging to liberate them at the termination of the war, without having first made some arrangement with the several States on the subject? Is it certain that necessary terms could be made with all the States? Such States as approved the introduction of slaves into the army, could not refuse them a home after the war. But what would be the course of such as believed the whole scheme unwise and dangerous? Suppose Virginia and North Carolina approve the measure, and not only consent to the emancipation of such of their slaves as may be put in the army, but agree that after the war they shall remain



within their borders, what shall be done if Georgia and South Carolina condemn it, and refuse them a home after the war? Or suppose the States this side the Mississippi embrace the plan recommended, and make all necessary pledges, but that the Trans-Mississippi States reject it, and enter into no engagements, what course is there to be pursued?

I suggest no doubt as to the power of the Government to employ negro troops. The public safety justifies the conscription of every white man able to bear arms. It would of course justify the conscription of every slave—the employment of every instrument—of all means within our power. The slave may be used to drive teams, to build fortifications—to fight, if you please. But the power of the government continues no longer than the public safety requires it. As soon as the necessity ceases, the power ceases. The Government may properly conscribe slaves for the public defence, but not for the purpose of defence, and subsequent emancipation. The Government has claimed no power to purchase and liberate, without the assent of the States—and an examination of the President's message, and the report of the Secretary of War, to which the message refers, will show that no such power is claimed.

The States alone have power of emancipation; and if the slave must be liberated, or promised liberation before he will fight, it follows that the States alone can make him an available soldier, and that State action must precede that of the Confederate Government. Nothing, therefore, short of united and harmonious action on the part of the several States, could give efficacy and success to the experiment.

I do not treat this as a question of property. It is not that men are unwilling to surrender their property, it is because they are convinced that the use proposed to be made of it is fearfully dangerous. No patriot who realizes the magnitude of the struggle, and the interests at stake, would hesitate for a moment to dedicate all that he has to the service of his country. For, who that is a man, would count himself rich, though he could point to his broad acres, and see hills and valleys covered with his herds, if he were the slave of a grinding despotism, and subject to the taunts and insults of an insolent foe? What is property without a country? He has no country, who has no liberty.

Who then will stop to count or value property? If the country need it, let it go—lands, houses, slaves, life itself—are worth nothing now, except so far as they may assist and help in this life-struggle. If my country take my property to save my honour and liberty, and that of my family—if the enemy invade, capture, and destroy it, I shall have no cause to reproach myself. I shall not have wasted it by bad management, or in indolence and ease. If my country be free, I shall be rich, though I have not a penny. I shall feel that I am a welcome guest in every good man's house. Poverty shall never cause a blush, and the recollection of losses shall give me no pain. I shall live out the brief period which may be vouchsafed me, a free man, and die leaving my children and grand-children in the enjoyment of the priceless boon of freedom, and bequeathing to them, at least, I trust, an honest name.

But all the objections to the measure have not yet been stated. Not

long since, this House adopted with great unanimity, Mr. Trenholm's currency scheme. The basis of this scheme is the products of slave labour. Cotton, corn and wheat are "immutably pledged" to the redemption of our Treasury notes. Where are these to come from, if you take the negro from our fields, and place him in the army? It may be said you will take only a portion of the able-bodied men. But the first step will have been taken, and confidence have been lost. One step will be followed by another. The institution of slavery will be doomed, and all the credit it gives will be gone. Its money value has heretofore been immense, while the annual products made us rich. This money value will be destroyed, and these products soon become so small, as hardly to support our population. However this may be, it can hardly be controverted, that the employment of slaves in our army would be the death of Mr. Trenholm's currency measure. Our currency would become worthless, and we should have no credit. In such a condition, what could be done?

With these grave objections to the measure, and these obstacles in the way of its execution, it seems to me, the agitation of the subject was unfortunate. For, it cannot be denied, that it has had a most depressing influence upon the popular mind in many sections of the country. It has been regarded as an admission by our authorities, that we were reduced to an extremity; and the conviction (more general than is supposed) that the proposed measure, so far from affording relief, would only increase our difficulties and embarrassments, has produced a painful despondency. Men's hearts failed them, when it was seriously proposed to employ negro troops, who had never desponded before. I regret to be compelled thus to speak, but I am dealing with a question of great magnitude, and the truth, though painful, must be spoken.

There are men of intelligence and worth, who not only favour the measure, but entertain little or no doubt, that our slaves, if put into the army, will turn for us the tide of battle. But prudence would suggest, that no matter how great their confidence, it would be unwise, even if they had the power to do so, to hazard an experiment of such a delicate, yet momentous character, against the judgment and sentiments of so large a portion of the community.

If, however, the measure is to be adopted—the experiment to be made—it should be done without delay. It has been shown that much must be done before it can be tried. I repeat, let there be no delay, but let us go about it with earnest activity and determined energy. The States have to be consulted—the negroes to be purchased or conscribed, and trained. We have not a minute to spare. If we are ever to employ them as soldiers, let us do so now, and make the war "sharp and decisive." If, on the contrary, we are not to resort to this extreme alternative, let it be known at once; so that the painful and depressing agitation may not longer be continued. If those, who see safety and independence in negro troops are to be disappointed, let them know it, so that their minds and energies may be turned to such measures as will recruit our armies, and provide for their support and comfort. If those, who have regarded the introduction of slaves into our army as an omen of disaster and misfortune, are to be relieved of their apprehensions, do not delay to revive their hopes and confidence. **Let the unprofitable and mischievous agitation cease forever, and all**



classes start afresh, with an unalterable determination to "spend and be spent" in the defence of our altars and our homes.

Prompt and definite action is necessary for another reason. Our slaves are now running away from apprehension that they are to be put in the army. They are opposed to fighting. They preferred to remain at their homes when there was danger of being forced to fight if they went to the enemy, while nothing of the kind was proposed among us. But since the agitation of the subject here, they have become alarmed, and fearing that we will force them into the army, are daily making their escape. This information I receive from various sources. It is in accordance with the negro character. In order to escape present danger, they will run the hazard of even much more serious dangers in the future. All know this who understand—are familiar with the race. Placed in difficulties—threatened with suffering or punishment, there is no confession they will not make—no promise they will not give. The hope of present deliverance controuls their words and actions. If, therefore, you intend to make them soldiers, take them before they run away; if you do not, so declare, and let them remain at home.

But, it is asked, shall we not arm and fight our slaves, rather than be subjugated? This is begging the question. It is assumed that we shall be subjugated, unless we arm and fight our slaves. The assumption is not true. We are not reduced to the necessity of staking our salvation on the capacity and fidelity of negro troops. We have "stout hearts and strong arms" enough to drive back our enemies. They occupy less of our territory than they did twelve months ago. If they have marched through the heart of Georgia, they have been driven from the Trans-Mississippi and other sections. If we have met with reverses, so have victories crowned our arms. Our forces are being recruited, and our soldiers enjoy good health. Our fields have been fruitful, and no disease has scourged our land. If our people remain firm—if we are true to ourselves, there is no cause for despondency. We believe our cause just—our enemies faithless and cruel. The struggle is gigantic—the prize priceless. The contest may yet continue—the issue is not doubtful. We may have more to endure. More of our brave men may be called upon to seal their devotion to their country, with their blood. More widows and orphans may be added to the already fearful number. But let there be no quailing among us. Without all this, those who fall, as well as those who survive, would be slaves of the most cruel and heartless tyranny. Those costly, but noble sacrifices are the price of freedom. Liberty is the child of oppression, and has ever been baptized in the blood of the brave.

Let it not be asked, whether we will not arm our slaves, rather than be subjugated? Every true man will do any thing—make any sacrifice, rather than fail in our present struggle—yea, sacrifice life itself; for failure would be worse than death. But let us take care that in our impatience, we are not driven into doubtful and ruinous experiments. Privation and want, pain and suffering, affliction and sorrow are blessings, when compared with humiliation and shame. We may pass through the "fiery furnace" and come out refined, but the flood of "Yankee notions" and Yankee rule would consume and destroy us.



Let us therefore accept with humble submission, whatever further trials Providence may have in store for us, as a people. Let us do so with a sure trust, and abiding faith, that "the right shall prevail." And though storm and tempest continue, and the night be dark and dismal, the morning shall presently come, and bring with it the light of cloudless day. Then shall it be manifest, that Liberty is cheap, though purchased with blood.

I have already said, Mr. Speaker, that it would be right to arm our slaves against our enemies. My opposition to the scheme arises from no scruple of that kind. Why, sir, there is no power, no influence, no instrument I would not bring to bear against them. Why should we hesitate? They have faithlessly and wantonly come among us with fire and sword. They have broken down our hedges, stolen our property, burned our houses over the heads of our wives and children, desecrated our altars, attempted to incite our slaves to rise up and cut our throats, murdered our men and insulted and dishonored our women. Scruple to employ any agency against them! Why, sir, if I had power over all the beasts of the forest, I would plant myself on Plymouth Rock, gather them together from all the corners of the earth, into one grand menagerie, and turn them loose to devour and destroy the puritanical hypocrites. I might, perhaps, give notice to the "ten just men" (if there be so many) to flee for their lives. I remember, while I speak this, that the Almighty has said that "vengeance" is his. I would destroy them to save my own people, and feel that I was rendering service to my kind. For while the pure, unadulterated, New England Yankee, who, for *conscience sake*, is always meddling with other people's business is on the earth, there will be strife and contention. We are taught, that when the millennium comes, there will be peace and good will. As long as this Yankee race exists and retain their present dispositions, it may be known, that happy period doth not approach.

But, we are told, that distinguished Generals favour the employment of slaves as soldiers. Were our Generals to recommend a particular military movement, it would be immodest—presumptuous in mere civilians to criticise such movement; but the propriety of taking slaves from the field, and putting arms into their hands, may be discussed and decided as well by civilians as military men. Whether they can be spared from the labour of the country, and whether they will make capable and trusty soldiers or not, are questions, which require for their proper consideration and decision, a thorough knowledge of the wants of our people and army, and an intimate acquaintance with the negro character. Civilians and military men agree, that we should have a larger army. Whether it is safe and judicious, to attempt to increase it, by the introduction of slaves, is a question, which civilians are, perhaps, quite as well qualified to decide as military men. Surely no General can speak on the subject, with such authority, as to make it my duty, to give up my conviction, that by the employment of negro troops, we should add no strength to our army, while we would jeopard our supplies, and inaugurate a policy which would shake, if not destroy the very foundations of our social system.

We are told, if we do not take the slaves and put them in the army, the enemy will. This proves too much, for if it be true, then we should

take every slave capable of bearing arms. If we left half, they would take them.

When it shall be established, that slaves can be relied upon to fight for us, and necessity requires it, I would not, of course, hesitate to arm them and put every one in the army, who could be spared from agriculture, and I would send the old and feeble men home from the army, to make provisions, and put slaves in their stead.

But, it is said, "you agree, that our army should be increased, and yet you oppose the employment of slaves. How do you expect or propose to prosecute the war?" Mr. Speaker, I claim no military knowledge—do not speak as a military man—but it is easy to tell what I would do: We have an army now in the field, much larger, than the combined forces of Wellington and Napoleon, at the battle of Waterloo. I would nurse this army—feed it well—clothe it well, and pay it regularly. I would increase its numbers, by conducting the business of conscription, in such manner, as to send to the field *at once*, all, who should fight for us, and send home at once, all, who are unable to fight, and can do more for us at home, than in the field; and thus save them from annoyances, delays and vexations, which are enough to make the soul sick. To this end, I would utterly destroy the present system. In addition to this, I would appoint a commission of three from each State, to consist of men above the military age, of known virtue and intelligence and firmness, and give them authority to go to every post and county in their State, and to call up every man attached to the various departments, and to order directly into the field, all who, by law ought to be there. These things, I would do by the necessary legislation.

I would do more. I would, in the language of the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Chambers, whose speech did honour to himself as well as to the people, who sent him here, assist our army "by the steady co-operation of all classes at home."

Yes, Mr. Speaker, every field, that is cultivated, should be with a view to feed our soldiers; every sheep that is sheared, should be to make clothes to warm them; every hide, that is tanned, should be to make shoes, with which they may be shod. If any are to go without shoes, or warm clothing, or plenty of food, let it not be those, who stand sentinel for our liberties in the cold, pelting rains of winter nights; but let it be those at home, who can seek shelter from the storm, and sit quietly and warm themselves by the bright burning fire.

Many classes at home, have assisted our soldiers by "steady co-operation." Our women have toiled day and night—making clothes, knitting socks, and waiting upon the sick and wounded. They have sent their husbands and sons into the field—telling them, though with tears in their eyes, that a hero's grave was to be preferred to a coward's home. This is co-operation—acceptable both to God and man. Generous men have contributed liberally to the support of the soldiers' families, and have seen their wants supplied—this is co-operation, effectual co-operation. Our clergy have repaired every Sunday morning to the sanctuary, and there before Heaven pronounced our cause just, and taught their people, that next to the service of God, is the service of country, and that, he who avoided or skulked his duty in such a contest, was true, neither to his country nor his God. This is co-operation. The Press throughout the land, with rare exceptions, have

thrown its whole soul and strength into the struggle. Day after day, has it come to us to cheer and animate. In seasons of depression, it has revived our hopes. In the day of victory it has rejoiced with us, but counselled moderation, and admonished us, that the conflict was not over, and incited us to higher efforts and nobler resolves. It has rendered our convictions of duty firm and stable, by pointing out our wrongs—shewing the perfidy and barbarity of our enemy. It has shewn us, that while war is an affliction, Yankee subjugation would be a perpetual curse, more intolerable than death itself. It has hunted out all skulkers, and shamed hundreds and thousands into the army—ten times, I verily believe, as many as the whole number of Editors and their employees. This is co-operation—powerful co-operation. Our army, on more occasions than one, has been reduced to straits for supplies—our authorities have called upon the people for assistance, and many noble, unselfish men, have not only sent forward all their surplus, but even trenched upon their necessary family supplies. Our impressing officers have gone out, and frequently, either wantonly or through ignorance, exceeded their authority, and committed outrages; our people, from a spirit of patriotism, have submitted, or, if they have complained, it was to prevent a repetition of such acts. Now these persons assist our army by unselfish co-operation.

I would, Mr. Speaker, that there were none among “all classes at home,” who failed to co-operate with our “citizen soldiery.” The man or woman, who countenances in any way a deserter or skulker, or advises the soldier to remain at home after his furlough is out, assists our enemy. The man, who extorts upon the community—upon the soldiers or their families, fights against us. The planter, who keeps back part of his tithe, is a robber, and steals from the soldiers. The man, who gives in a false list of his property, and thereby avoids taxation, cheats the Government. Such persons and the like, co-operate against our soldiers, and do not assist. We must have the assistance of those at home—that assistance must be steady.

There is another class, Mr. Speaker, and by no means a small one, who do not co-operate with our “citizen soldiery.” I allude to that class of critics, and fault-finders at home, who would have won every battle, we have lost—avoided every error we have committed—who declared Beauregard no General, because at the first battle of Manassas, he did not, with a handful of men, pursue and take the whole Yankee army, and capture Washington to boot—who were vociferous for the removal of Sidney Johnson, because he did not successfully defend Fort Donelson and Nashville against overwhelming forces—who pronounced Lee incompetent, because he could not control the seasons, and overwhelm Rosecrans in the mountains of Virginia—who denounced Jos. E. Johnston because he did not, with an insufficient force, storm the breastworks, cut through the lines of Grant, and rescue Vicksburg; who denounced the conscript law as unconstitutional and oppressive—declared the tax in kind an outrage, the impressment laws oppressive, our Government a Despotism—and who proclaim the administration weak, and the President a tyrant, because they do not approve all, that he does or recommends.

‘This class, Mr. Speaker, do not assist our soldiers, by a “steady co-operation.” I cast no imputation on their motives—but here, in the



presence of this House and before the country, I charge that they render no assistance to our "citizen soldiery," but, on the contrary, that though unwittingly, they give aid and comfort to our enemies.

We are all involved in this great struggle. All are soldiers, though not all in the field. Every man has his part to act. He cannot avoid it, if he would. The President is our chosen Leader—upon him much must depend. We are strong and powerful just in proportion as we are united and harmonious.

Confidence in our leader is indispensable. What would be thought of the soldier, who upon the eve of battle should take every occasion to declare to his fellow-soldiers, "We are to have a terrible conflict—it is for life or death. I have no confidence in our General. He is weak, and tyrannical, but our cause is just, and we must fight to the death." Would that be the way to ensure victory? Would that strengthen and animate his comrades, or would it discourage and weaken them? Or suppose, Mr. Speaker, that I were to get up in this Hall, and under the responsibility which rests upon me, as a member of the Legislative Department of the Government, were to declare, that the head of the Executive Department was a tyrant, and our Government a despotism, would I be assisting the citizen-soldiery by steady co-operation? Our newspapers are carried daily into our camps, and are there extensively read. I have many constituents among the soldiers—men, who have confidence in me. They would read, that I had made these grave charges against my Government. Might I not well fear, sir, that I should damp their ardour and enthusiasm? Would it be strange, if they reasoned, somewhat in this way: "We were brought here to fight against our enemies, who wish to destroy our liberties. What shall we gain by it? Our representative, in whom we confide, tells us, there is already a despotism at home, a tyrant at the head of it." Suppose some of them deserted, might they not find some palliation for their grievous offence, in my indiscretions? Have not deserters already during this war, when they were about to suffer the penalty of death, charged their fate to the improper teachings of men in position?

The gentleman from Mississippi is right; our army must be sustained by the steady co-operation of all classes at home.

But it is asked, would you sustain measures you cannot approve? By no means. It is our duty to oppose what our judgments cannot approve. We are not men, if we fail to do so. But if we find ourselves in a minority—if a majority of our equals think the measure required by the public exigencies, and that they have authority to pass it, and it becomes the law of the land, and is sustained by the judiciary, we have discharged our duty, and "flagrante bello" should no longer war against it. The Conscription law was bitterly opposed; it was, however, enacted, and its constitutionality sustained by our courts. Was it not then the duty of every good man, to acquiesce and heartily to assist in its execution, as a great war measure? Let us differ like men—let us argue and debate. Let each man, with his hand upon his heart, vote his honest judgment. After the die is cast, let us act like patriots. There must be conflict of opinion. We can't all see and think alike, but obedience to law is the duty of all, and all can obey.

We hear gentlemen declare on this floor that our Government is a despotism and Mr. Davis a tyrant. Now, Mr. Speaker, is this fair or

just to the Executive? If our Government be a despotism, as gentlemen would have us believe, who made it so? The Conscript law gives control over the persons of all from 17 to 50—the Impressment and Tax laws over the property of the country. By these laws power is given over the purse and sword. Are these gentlemen opposed to putting men in the army—opposed to arming, feeding, and clothing them? If not—if they agree that we must have soldiers, and that they must be fed and clothed, do they not know that the President, as Commander-in-Chief, must, under our Constitution, have control of the army and its supplies? Is not, therefore, opposition to the President on this ground, opposition to the war itself?

Besides, who conferred these powers on the President? He has not usurped them—his enemies have not charged him with usurpation. Congress—you—the Representatives of the people, in their name and behalf, have conferred them. And yet he is treated as if he exercised these great war powers without authority. I repeat, you cannot defend the country without men and money—you cannot, under the Constitution, place men and money in other hands than the President's. To arraign him, therefore, on this account, is to oppose the prosecution of the war.

No one dreamed, when hostilities commenced, that we should, at the expiration of near four years, be still involved in one of the bloodiest and most gigantic wars that ever shook the earth. We began without an organized government—without the munitions of war—without friends and without money. We have had unnumbered difficulties and obstacles to encounter—all the forms of government for the civil and military departments to institute, and ten thousand and more officers to appoint, and send to every corner of the Confederacy; and all the complex machinery of government to set in motion; and this, too, in time of war. No man born of woman, could have accomplished all this, without committing many grave and serious blunders and errors, and making many bad appointments.

And how unreasonable are many of our complaints. A Quartermaster is guilty of corruption in office—an Impressing agent exceeds his authority and oppresses. Instead of preferring charges against them, and furnishing the evidence to sustain the charges, we abuse the Government. Is this right? Have any of the Departments refused to cause investigations to be made, and the guilty to be punished? How can they act until charges are preferred?

When I hear gentlemen indulge in denunciation and invective, I am astounded. It seems to me they act as if they thought we were engaged in ordinary party conflicts, and that in order to ensure the success of their party, they should render their adversary as odious as possible. Mr. Speaker, I am deeply pained at such exhibitions. I have continually resting upon my mind the absorbing conviction that the whole resources of the country, and our united and harmonious counsels, are all necessary to our salvation in this great struggle. I cannot escape this conviction. We have no energies to waste in internal strife. We should have no blows to inflict, except upon our enemies. We cannot strike our Government without striking ourselves. We cannot weaken it without weakening ourselves. It is our Government—Mr. Davis is our President. If we refuse to aid and sustain him in his office, we



refuse to help ourselves. If we destroy confidence in him, we peril our own existence as a people. Under him we must achieve our independence, or under him go down and live under the most galling and humiliating despotism. To undertake, therefore, to hold him up to the public indignation—to denounce him as a tyrant, and our Government as a tyranny, because Congress confers upon him during this war extraordinary powers, is to sport and trifle with the question of our independence.

But, if under the influence of our passions or prejudices, we deny the Executive justice, for mercy's sake let us not forget our bleeding country. Let us hold, if we cannot strike him without striking our country. Mr. Speaker, I am not speaking as the personal friend of Mr. Davis—I am, as you know, sir, unacquainted with him, having been introduced to him by you since the meeting of Congress—I am his friend, because I am the friend of our cause. But were I his veriest enemy, I would in this hour of trial, use my utmost endeavours to sustain and uphold him in his administration. He deserves, and I believe has, the confidence of the country—I judge him by his acts—I have observed an unwavering devotion to his country, and have never discovered, nor have others shown, a disposition to usurp powers not conferred. On the contrary, he has been sparing in the exercise of the powers conferred upon him. He has exhibited moderation and fortitude throughout his administration, and has, I verily believe, laboured to advance and secure the independence and happiness of his country. That he has committed errors—that like other men, he has imperfections, I doubt none would sooner admit than himself. Were I to denounce such a man, and thus, so far as my limited influence may extend, impair confidence in the Government, I should feel that, so far from assisting our army, I was, in truth, “giving aid and comfort to the enemy.”

It is refreshing to turn from the complaining, fault-finding critics at home, to the more impartial abroad. Even our enemies declare their respect for the Rebel President, while foreigners, struck with his “moderation, firmness and statemanship,” have been constant in his praises. But it is for the sake of our country—not for the sake of Mr. Davis—that I beg gentlemen to give his administration a just and generous support.

I have thus attempted to show that it is our duty, as legislators, to sustain our army, by rendering a generous support to the administration. It is not less the duty of the Executive, to cheer and animate the army by all appropriate means. Ours is an army of citizens, and their sentiments and feelings must be consulted and respected.

The President, who is Commander-in Chief, would be direct, were he to heed temporary clamour or excitement. Such a course would not only be unjust, but would frequently result in detriment to the public interests. But whenever it is ascertained that any officer in command of an army becomes obnoxious to the men and officers, and that this feeling is settled and fixed, it is plainly, it seems to me, his duty, no matter what may be his individual opinions, no longer to continue such officer in command of that army. And so, if it should become manifest that a particular army, with great unanimity, desire a certain General to command them, and the country generally participate in



this desire, I cannot doubt that it would be the part of wisdom, no less than of duty, that the Executive should defer to such desire—nor can I doubt that in such case our Executive would gracefully do so. I can imagine no step so likely to restore confidence, and cheer and animate our army.

Mr. Speaker, I am done. The courtesy of this House, in postponing the order of the day, to permit me to conclude my remarks, has placed me under obligations which I shall not forget. I promise not to abuse this mark of kindness by presuming upon it hereafter.

permalife•  
pH 8.5